

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks at a Campaign Reception in New York City
February 7, 2024

Well, thank you, thank you, thank you.

Your son may not remember this, but one of the greatest honors I've had in my life—for real—is that every year at the end of the season of the—of the interns—excuse me, the pages coming in, they vote who their favorite Senator was. I got voted 5 years in a row. *[Laughter]* So I was campaigning.

I got to the Senate floor not much older than my Senate page. The fact of the matter is that some of—

[At this point, the President addressed an audience member.]

Uh-oh, I'm in trouble. You're really here. I'm teasing. *[Laughter]*

But any rate, what happened was that I got—I got there, and I was 29 years old. I wasn't old enough to be sworn in when I first got elected. And I came with a real mandate. Nixon won my State with over 64 percent of the vote, and I won by 3,100 votes against a guy who had never lost an election. And everyone keeps telling—and from that point on, everybody would say: "What's the secret? What did you do?"

I said—I only can figure out one, at least in my State, and that is that you've got to figure out what's worth losing over—what's worth losing over and be willing to lose rather than give.

And, folks, look, one of the things that—Maureen and Steve, thanks for hosting us tonight. And I know it's not easy. The Secret Service have been living here for 12 months. *[Laughter]* But—and all you've done for the Democratic Party over the years.

Look—and thanks to all of you for your support.

The fact is that, you know, this is an unusual time in American history. And a lot of you—I look out in the room—are students of American history and have impacted on it not in insignificant ways. And—but there's a lot at stake.

Every time I attend—I've had the honor of being Vice President of the United States with Barack. And one of the reasons he asked me to do that job was because of my background in foreign policy, and I had traveled the world doing a lot of things, doing issues that were pertinent at the time.

And it's interesting to me that the rest of the world is looking at what we're doing in a way that I've never observed. Now, I know I don't look it, but I'm over 40. *[Laughter]* And I've been doing this a long time. But the last—whether it was the G-20 or the G-7 or whatever I've attended, I've spent over—I think they've keeping—they're keeping the record in the—in the Intelligence Committee—I mean, intelligence service. I think I've done over 194 hours with just other heads of state—dealing with them. I mean, that's all putting NATO together, making sure that we had some coherence of what we were doing.

And it's interesting to hear—the first meeting I attended as President of the United States, it was in Great Britain with the G-7—in England. And I showed up, and we were all sitting—it was a beautiful setting overlooking the water. And I sat down, and I said, "Well, America is back." And Macron looked at me and said: "For how long? For how long?" Not a joke. This is a fact.

And with that—excuse me—Helmut Kohl said, "Joe, what—what would you think if you picked up the phone—if you picked up the paper tomorrow and learned in the London Times in the front page that a thousand people stormed the Parliament, broke down the doors of the House of Commons, killed two bobbies, and, in the process, ended up trying to stop the—the election of a Prime Minister?"

And I thought about that. And I mean this sincerely. Think about it: what we would think if another country—not nearly as powerful as us, if they were engaged in that activity.

And so I think, you know, I start with the simplest message: From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank you for—you're the reason I'm President of the United States of America. Because you are the opinion makers. You're not just contributors. I appreciate that very much, and it makes me competitive. But you're opinion makers. And the fact that so many of you would be willing to support me is—makes a big difference to me. It makes a big difference to my standing in the community at large.

And you're the reason Kamala Harris is the first historic President—Vice President of the United States of America. You're the reason Donald Trump is a former President. And—and you're the reason we're going to make him a loser again, God willing.

But in 2020, I ran because I thought this country was—and everything it stood for, everything that we stand for as a country, was at stake. Some of you may remember, I made a speech at the—when I was in Philadelphia at Independence Hall about democracy was at stake. And the press—they're good folks, but they played it like: "What the hell is he talking about? The—what do you mean democracy is at stake?"

Well, folks, that's exactly what I believed then and I still believe now. What's happening is that the American people thought democracy was at stake. The intelligentsia wasn't so sure about it. But the American people thought it.

What happened was—remember, we weren't supposed to win in 2020. We weren't supposed to be able to put this together. We won. And then in 2022, there was—a great red wave was going to come. Remember? Going to wipe all the Democrats out. We had the best turnout of any interim President—in the interim—interim President of any President except one in the last century. We hardly lost anything. And then, in 2024—2023, we won every contested race out there.

So my point is, the public is changing too. And they're wondering where we're going to go. They're worried. They're worried. And those of you who are in the media business know that, you know, people—there's no editors anymore. The idea that you have someone saying, "You can't print that; it's not true"—the idea, it just doesn't exist. I'm not being critical of the press. They're in a tough spot. They're in a tough spot.

And I'm not saying they're for me or against me. But the fact of the matter is, it's hard to determine where you go to get your news. People seem to pick the news they want to hear rather than the news they want to get or what's, in fact, true or what's, in fact, more in contention.

And so one of the things that I've tried to do was to just be straight up with people as to why I did what I wanted—what I said I would try to do. We got the Recovery Act done. The Recovery Act was consequential. It had—how can you be the leading nation in a world when your infrastructure is ranked 18 in the world? How does that happen? How does that happen? It doesn't happen. It doesn't happen.

How do you get to the point where you're able to put together an economy when major elements of that economy are out of sync with what's happening in the world? I remember I've—

we invented that computer chip, which is essential for almost everything now—beyond weapons, but from telephones to television to automobiles.

So I got in the plane and I went to South Korea. And I sat down with—[inaudible]—and I—and Samsung, and they agreed to put about \$100 billion into moving their chips factory to the United States. New York State is going to benefit incredibly well up in—from the Syracuse area up to the—[inaudible].

But the point is—what I'm saying is that people came and invested because they still believe in us. The rest of the world believes in us. And they think we can do—I asked why they're investing in the United States to the chairman of the board of Samsung. He said, "Two reasons: one, because you have the best workers in the world, and, two, you have the—you, the United States, are the safest place we can invest."

And so we got over \$50 billion being invested. It's going to change your State, by the way, in the north in a big way.

But I made a commitment that I was going to be President for everyone—not just red States or blue States but everyone. A significant number of the facilities that are being built now, of the 800,000 manufacturing jobs we created are in red States.

I love it when you have people like that blonde-haired woman from—anyway—[laughter]—talking about how she—how—what dangerous things I've done, but wanted to be there for the groundbreaking of two events that were affecting her State. I told her I'd see her at the groundbreaking.

But my generic point is that the thing that's changed the most as it relates to my career and—36 years in the Senate and 8 years as Vice President before 3 years as President—is that I've never seen—and I—look, I go back to Jesse Helms. I go back to, you know, folks that were the old segregationists—the reason—one of the reasons why I ran in the first place. Jim—James O. Eastland talked at me like this every time he'd see me.

[*The President imitated a Southern accent.*]

I was on his committee.

And the fact is that, you know, they were tough. But we still, after we fought like hell—Teddy Kennedy and Eastland would rip into each other on the floor and then go have lunch together in the Senate dining room. They didn't change their views, but they were—there was this—there was a sense of—as strange as it sounds—civility. I mean, Strom Thurmond asked me to do his eulogy.

I asked my grandfather, "Is it okay, Pop?" You know? [Laughter] Seriously. There were thousands of people who showed up for his eulogy in the State of South Carolina. And you know, Strom Thurmond, for example, by the end of his career, had more African Americans on his staff than any Senator, including Teddy Kennedy.

Events change people when they get exposed. Not everybody, but it takes time. I'm not making a case for Strom Thurmond.

But the generic point is, there was a—there was something that—that we actually spoke to one another. We actually—and as much as we disagreed. And we didn't engage in, as a practical matter, going against something that we thought was good for the country because it was going to help someone of the opposite party. I'm sure it happened. But I don't recall. Nothing comes to mind immediately in the 36 years I was a Senator. And I was chairman of Judiciary Committee and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and served longer than all, I think, but nine people.

And so the point is, things have changed drastically. I was asked why—I'm going stand for—in front of this, if I——

[The President walked away from the podium.]

I was asked why I—I was asked early on—*[inaudible]*. And one of the things that changed—*[inaudible]*—so much time in my career that the opposition is—everything is personal. And when I ran in 2020, I said I was running to restore the soul of the country. I meant it. *[Inaudible]*—a sense of decency. That's the way we treat each other.

Look at what's going on. Look at what this other guy is saying, the things he says. These kids—a young man was killed in Iowa and the schoolteacher was killed—a principal. And he said—when asked the question—just "get over it"—we've just got to "get over it."

You know, I'm glad I wasn't around when he was in France and asked to go up to the American cemetery. My son had just died. And he spent a year in Iraq and his hooch was near a burn pit——

[The President was given a handheld microphone.]

And his hooch was near a burn pit. And he came home, and he had glioblastoma, and he died. And Trump looked at—now, I wasn't there. But Trump said and publicly stated it—that "I don't want to go up there"; a bunch of "losers" and "suckers."

I mean, look, this is more than—it's not a political criticism. It's a character criticism of the things we're doing. And so I'm not—and by the way, all the talk about—like, look what's happened now. They love the fact that they think they have a great—a great issue on immigration to beat Biden—immigration.

The first bill I introduced when I got—became President was to reform the immigration system—the first one. They wouldn't touch it. And so we came along this time and Lankford, who they really threw the man—the man overboard, but they negotiated all through the entire vacation, all through—I mean, they just went straight through—weekends. And they finally reached an agreement.

And it didn't have everything I wanted in it. It didn't have "Dreamers" in it; didn't have a lot of things. But I was confident if we got it done, we could then get more done. But the point of it was that you think about what happened because they thought—because Trump decided that it was something that—that would help me and hurt him take—take away an issue.

So what did he do? And you guys know this—many of you, as well as I do because you know a lot of people in the Congress and the Senate. He got on the phone around the clock calling people saying: "If you do this, I'll—there'll be retribution. It will be a problem." And they backed off. Every one of them backed off. I mean, come on. Come on.

And the fact is—anyway. The point I'm making is that this is not politics as usual. This is not your father's Republican Party. This is a different breed of cat. And I think it's dangerous. I think it's dangerous.

I think it's dangerous to be engaged in this kind of politics, because it ends up doing nothing but just dragging us all to the bottom. It doesn't do anything to uplift anybody.

And I'm not going to go on with other things. You understand who he is. So it's not that I'm so good, but you have to have somebody to beat somebody. And where I am is that—they say, "Well, isn't Biden too old?" Hell, I'm only 40 times 2. *[Laughter]*

But all kidding aside, you know, one of the things that age does for you is, it gives you a little bit of wisdom. I've been around for every President since Nixon. And I've been with every major world leader since then. I've known them. And so we haven't done badly.

We've not only got the—and dealing with the environment. Well, they told me not to try it. Well, we got \$316—\$368 billion for the environment. We got a trillion 300 billion dollars for infrastructure. Like I said, how in God's name can we lead the world and have a second rate infrastructure? Not a joke. Think—I mean, I'm being literal. Think about it.

So my generic point is this: that there is room—there is room to, in fact, be able to get things done. And I think we demonstrated—I think we got a lot done that no one thought was possible to get done. Granted, we didn't have a lot of Republican help. But some of it, we did. Some of it, we did. We got enough.

And I think it's important that we get back to some degree of normalcy in terms of what constitutes political—what's politically acceptable. You know, I sit in that little dining room where he sat off my Oval—off the Oval Office, where he sat for 4 hours watching what was going up on the Hill. The idea that he wouldn't stand up and say a thing—name me a President who has encouraged or condoned political violence—political violence. I mean, internally, in the United States, since—since Lincoln's day. Name me one.

And so it just—it's sending a message around the world where people are wondering: "What has become of the United States? Where are we? Where are we going? What's going to happen?" And like I said, one of the things that—that I find—how can I say it?—I find strange is that the United States—and I've been doing this a long time—the United States is viewed—and Madeleine Albright was right: We are the essential nation. We really are.

I'll ask you this—I'll ask a rhetorical question. The United States steps out of events, what happens? What happens in Middle East? What happens with regard to the Pacific—the Taiwan Strait? What happens in Asia, generally? What happens with Ukraine?

The idea that Ukraine—you know, there's 365,000 Russian soldiers killed or wounded—or significantly wounded. He's on the balls of his heels. And what are we doing? Stepping back? Stepping back? I mean, I don't know what—I'll conclude with this point, and then I'll be happy—when the press leaves, I'll take questions. I know you don't want—that wasn't part of the plan, but I'm happy to.

One of the things that—I guess the best way to say it is: If you think about what it is that is going to affect events around the world, and because this is getting to be a pretty small world—a pretty small world, man—what—what is it?

And one of the things before when I—and you and I, I think, talked about this, Phil, a little while ago, when I was thinking of running last time. If you think about why is it important?

I was going to write a book on the impact of technology on American policy. Because you go all the way back to—go back to Gutenberg and the printing press, Europe would be a very different place if he didn't invent that printing press. Not a joke; in a literal sense. I could just go down the list.

And what happened was that event occurred down in Virginia where those guys all showed up with Nazi swastikas and torches and were in the woods and the fields. A lot of them came out of the fields with these torches and carrying Nazi banners, singing the same anti-Semitic bile that was sung back in the thirties in Germany. Literally, not figuratively. And a young woman was killed. I talked to her mom.

And the President then was asked, "What do you think?" He said, "There's some very good people on both sides." When has a President ever said anything like that—including Strom

Thurmond? When the hell has that ever happened? That's not who we are. But you travel the world, all of you, the rest of the world is wondering who we are, wondering where we're going.

And I think the United States—we have the dubious responsibility of being the ones who can order the world the best at this point. And I don't mean dictate. I mean, at least set—make sure there are certain standards that we—can be relied upon.

Well, anyway, why don't I thank the press for their participation—[laughter]—and then I'll take questions, if that's okay. I know I wasn't supposed to do this. I was supposed to mingle. But maybe—I'd like to know what's on your mind or what you think—what mistakes you think I'm making, what you think I should be doing, what you think I shouldn't be doing.

Is that okay, boss?

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:51 p.m. at the residence of Maureen White and Steven Rattner. In his remarks, he referred to former President Barack Obama; President Emmanuel Macron of France; Lee Jae-yong, vice chairman, Samsung Electronics Co., Ltd.; Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene; Sen. James P. Lankford; and Susan Bro, mother of Heather D. Heyer, who was killed during the vehicular attack in Charlottesville, VA, on August 12, 2017. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 9. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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Subjects: 2021 civil unrest and violence at U.S. Capitol; Climate change; Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy; France, President; Group of Seven (G-7) nations; Immigration reform; Infrastructure improvements; Iowa, shooting in Perry; Manufacturing industry, domestic investment; New York, Democratic Party event; New York, President's visit; Russia, conflict in Ukraine; Semiconductor manufacturing; U.S. diplomatic efforts, expansion; Ukraine, Russian invasion and airstrikes; Vice President; Virginia, 2017 civil unrest and violence in Charlottesville.

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